

Group wants more areas in state defined as wilderness

PHOENIX (AP) — An environmental group is asking that 1.2 million acres of federal land in Arizona be designated as wilderness because of the decline in the state's mining industry.

A study of Arizona's energy and mineral industries conducted by W. Thomas Goerold, chief economist for the Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C., indicates the mining

working force has dropped 34 percent during the past 20 years.

The study also says that fewer than 1 percent of the state's workers now are employed in the mining industry.

The study was conducted in the wake of an ongoing dispute between environmental groups and the federal Bureau of Land Management about how many additional acres

should be designated as wilderness in Arizona.

No development or road building is permitted in areas designated as wilderness.

BLM officials recommended last year that 1 million acres be designated, after the Arizona Wilderness Coalition proposed that 2.2 million acres get the wilderness designation.

Federal agencies also are required to evaluate potential for mineral production before an area receives wilderness designation.

But Dave Ridinger, president of the Arizona Mining Association, said that many of the proposed wilderness areas, especially in western Arizona, are in locations of "high mining potential" and should not be closed to mineral extraction.



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